UNITED NATIONS FOCUS:
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UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA

In order to contain the conflict precipitated by the Abkhazia region's attempt to secede from the Republic of Georgia, the Security Council, by resolution 858 (1993) of 24 August 1993, established the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). The mission is led by Brigadier-General John Hvidegaard, a national of Denmark, as Chief Military Observer. Abkhazia, strategically located on the Black Sea, shares a border with the Russian Federation, and its railroad network is considered to be the lifeline of Georgia, as well as of Armenia.

UNOMIG will comprise up to 88 military observers and will monitor the cease-fire Agreement of 27 July in Abkhazia with particular attention to the situation of the City of Sukhumi, as well as attempt to resolve reported incidents of cease-fire violations. At the same time, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, through his Special Envoy for Georgia, will step up efforts to facilitate the peace process and negotiations towards the achievement of a comprehensive political settlement.

BACKGROUND

The conflict in Abkhazia, in the northwestern region of the Republic of Georgia, began with social unrest and the attempts by the local authorities to separate from the Republic. It escalated into a series of armed confrontations in the summer of 1992 when the Government of Georgia, concluding that the railway and certain communication links had to be protected, deployed 2,000 Georgian troops in Abkhazia. Fierce fighting broke out on 14 August 1992 when the Georgian troops entered Abkhazia, resulting in some 200 dead and hundreds wounded. The Abkhaz leadership abandoned the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi and retreated to the town of Gudauta.

HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

The relations between the Abkhaz and the Georgians have been tense for decades. Historically, the Abkhaz attempted many times to separate from the Republic of Georgia. Most recently, in August 1990, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declared Abkhazia a sovereign republic of the Soviet Union independent of Georgia. This was immediately annulled by the Georgian Supreme Soviet. As a compromise for remaining in the Republic of Georgia, the Abkhaz were given disproportionate representation in the Supreme Council of Abkhazia. Of the total population in Abkhazia of 540,000, only about 18 percent are Abkhaz. The majority is Georgian (about 47 per cent), and others include Armenians (about 18 percent) and Russians (about 13 percent). In December 1991, a new Supreme Council was elected, which allocated 28 seats to the Abkhaz, 26 seats to the Georgians and 11 seats to the remaining 35 per cent of the population. This did not ease the tension between the Abkhaz and Georgians. The Supreme Council split into two opposing factions, and for all intents and purposes, it ceased to function.

THE 1992 CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT

A cease-fire agreement was reached on 3 September 1992 in Moscow by the Republic of Georgia, the leadership of Abkhazia and the Russian Federation. The agreement stipulated that "the territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia shall be ensured." It also set out, as the basis of the peace settlement, a cease-fire to take effect as of 5 September 1992; the establishment of a Monitoring and Inspection Commission composed of representatives of Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Federation to ensure compliance with the agreement; the disarming and withdrawal of all illegal armed formations that have come from outside Georgia, the reduction of the armed forces of Georgia in Abkhazia to an agreed number required to protect railway and certain other installations; the exchange of detainees, prisoners and hostages by 10 September 1992, the removal of all impediments to the free movement of goods and persons; the return of refugees to their homes; the search for missing persons; and the resumption of the normal functions by the legitimate authorities of Abkhazia by 15 September 1992. The agreement also included an appeal to the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to assist in the implementation of the peace settlement.

In a related development, on 10 September 1992, the Security Council asked the Secretary-General to

inform the Council periodically of the developments in Abkhazia.

SITUATION DETERIORATES

The agreement was never fully implemented. Both sides accused one another of continuing to violate the cease-fire. The situation remained very tense, as confirmed by the United Nations mission to the region from 12 to 20 September 1992. On 1 October 1992, the cease-fire collapsed, and the fighting resumed in all areas. The Abkhaz forces, supported by fighters from the North Caucasus region, quickly captured the major towns, and threatened to bring nearly 80 per cent of Abkhazia, including the capital city of Sukhumi, under their control. The raging fighting forced some 30,000 civilians to flee across the border to the Russian Federation. The parties to the conflict accused each other of human rights violations committed against the civilian population.

By November 1992, the outbreak of inter-ethnic fighting in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation added another dimension to the already tense situation in the area.

UNITED NATIONS EFFORTS

The United Nations sought to revive the peace process by diplomatic means. In carrying out peace-making efforts, the United Nations consulted with the CSCE so as to ensure effective coordination of activities. The Secretary-General sent a second mission in mid-October 1992 to explore specific ways in which the United Nations could support the implementation of the 3 September agreement, including the possible deployment of civilian and/or military observers. Two United Nations civilian personnel remained on the spot to provide an initial United Nations presence. They made frequent visits to the areas of conflict.

In November 1992, an integrated United Nations office opened in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, further strengthening the local United Nations presence. The office, which was initially composed of development and public information components, was to provide an integrated United Nations approach in the region and to assist in all aspects of the peace-making efforts of the Secretary-General.

Furthermore, following a request from the Government of Georgia, a United Nations inter-agency humanitarian assessment mission visited Georgia from 30 January to 16 February 1993. The mission, which was coordinated by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, included representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Based on the findings of the inter-agency mission, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs issued a consolidated appeal for emergency humanitarian assistance for Georgia with total requirements of US $20.9 million through December 1993.

On 11 May 1993, the Secretary-General stated that dispatching another United Nations mission at that time "would not be an adequate approach in attempting to revive the peace process," adding that "a more concentrated effort is needed for the establishment of a lasting cease-fire and for the resumption of a process of political negotiation."

SECRETARY-GENERAL APPOINTS SPECIAL ENVOY

On the same day, the Secretary-General appointed Mr. Edouard Brunner, a national of Switzerland, as his Special Envoy for Georgia for an initial period of three months. His tasks, based on the 1992 agreement, were to obtain agreement on a cease-fire; to assist the parties in reviving the process of negotiations to find a political solution to the conflict; and to enlist the support of neighbouring countries and others concerned in achieving the above objectives. The Special Envoy was to consult closely with the Chairman-in-Office of the CSCE.

SECRETARY-GENERAL RECOMMENDS DEPLOYMENT OF UN MILITARY OBSERVERS

The mission undertaken by the Special Envoy for Georgia, from 20 to 31 May 1993, reaffirmed that all parties supported an active role by the United Nations in reaching a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Abkhazia. The Secretary-General held the view, endorsed by the Security Council, that an integrated peace package should be implemented, which pursued a solution on three tracks: consolidation of the cease-fire; the launching of a political negotiating process; and support for these two processes by the neighbouring countries, particularly the Russian Federation, which had been active in mediating the conflict.

To this end, the Secretary-General proposed the deployment of United Nations military observers, as well as the holding of a peace conference under the auspices of the United Nations. When the Special Envoy presented the Secretary-General's approach during his mission, it was determined that the Republic of

Georgia fully supported all aspects of the approach; the Abkhaz side favoured the conference but not, at the time, the deployment of military observers; and the Russian Federation favoured the deployment of United Nations military observers, but had reservations about the conference.

In his report to the Security Council on 1 July 1993, the Secretary-General, while acknowledging the risks "of dangers inherent in deploying United Nations personnel to an area where an agreed cease-fire is not being respected," asserted that such a move "is justified in the present case given the urgent need to get the conflict in Abkhazia under control," thereby seeking the authorization of the Security Council to deploy United Nations military observers as soon as practicable.

Meanwhile, the situation on the ground deteriorated even further. A cease-fire had been agreed to on 14 May 1993 and came into effect on 20 May 1993, but it held for only two weeks. Between 2 and 7 July 1993, hospitals in the area of fighting reported that 77 Georgian soldiers were killed and 481 wounded; during the same period 6 civilians were killed and 43 wounded. Two hundred fifty wounded Abkhaz were reportedly counted in one hospital in Gudauta by an independent observer.

The Secretary-General informed the Security Council that "given this very serious deterioration in the military situation, I believe that it would not be wise to proceed with the actual deployment of 50 military observers, as proposed in my report, until the cease-fire has been re-established and is being respected."

On 9 July 1993, the Security Council adopted resolution 849 (1993), by which it approved the deployment of military observers as soon as the cease-fire was implemented. The Secretary-General, who was asked to make necessary preparations and to notify the Council when conditions permitted the deployment of the observers, announced, on 19 July, that he was sending a technical planning mission to the area.

CEASE-FIRE IS REACHED

On 27 July, a new agreement was concluded, through the mediation efforts of the Russian Federation, between the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities in Gudauta, which re-established a cease-fire as of 28 July. The agreement provided for the immediate commencement of phased demilitarization of the conflict zone. To monitor this process, international observers were to be deployed within 10 to 15 days of the date of the cease-fire. On 6 August, the Secretary-General reported to the Security Council that "conditions now prevail which permit the deployment of the proposed military observer mission." Based on the report of the technical planning team which had been in Georgia from 19 to 26 July, the Secretary-General concluded that an expanded mandate and additional military observers than had been previously envisaged "would strengthen the effectiveness of the United Nations observation mission considerably," and recommended the deployment of 88 military observers and supporting staff without delay. On the same day, the Security Council, by resolution 854 (1993), unanimously authorized the Secretary-General's 4 August request to send an advance team of up to 10 observers to help verify compliance with the cease-fire. The advance team was incorporated into the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) with its establishment on 24 August 1993.

FINANCIAL ASPECTS

The Secretary-General, in his initial assessment, estimated that the total cost to the United Nations related to the deployment of UNOMIG would amount to approximately $16.2 million for an initial six-month period, and the monthly cost thereafter would amount to $2 million. The costs of the observer mission are to be met by assessed contributions from United Nations Member States.

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